

CLOSING THE GAP: TRAINING MECHANIZED, INFANTRY AND ARMOR MARINES

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CG# 5

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20 February 2009

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>20 FEB 2009</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Closing the Gap: Training Mechanized, Infantry and Armor Marines</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Combat Dev,Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street,Quantico,VA,22134-5068</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>12</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

The central tenet of being a Marine is that every Marine is a rifleman. Many examples exist of cooks, administrators and mechanics picking up a rifle and defending bases, convoys and conducted limited offensive roles. Their success is based on the entry level training all Marines receive at the Recruit Depots and the Schools of Infantry. After entry level training, however, Marines go on to their military occupational specialty (MOS) where little direct contact occurs between the Marines of the infantry battalions and the Marines of the combat support units. The exception to this is the Marines in the combat arms MOSs, specifically Marines in tank and amphibious assault vehicle (AAV) units. Since tank, AAV and infantry Marines work and live closely together, those enlisted Marines should all be trained as infantry because they are all machinegunners, it decreases friction between communities, and future operations will have those Marines conducting traditional infantry tasks.

#### **BACKGROUND: HISTORY OF ENTRY LEVEL TRAINING**

For many years, all Marines received the same basic initial training. During World War II, Marines were taught combat skills including the service rifle, sub machinegun, automatic rifle, machinegun, infantry mortar system, hand and rifle grenades at boot camp. Their instruction included "extensive training . . . in combat tactics, chemical warfare, hand-to-hand

combat, first aid and of course marksmanship."<sup>1</sup> In the years immediately following World War II, two Infantry Training Regiments (ITR) were established with the intent of providing post boot camp infantry training of all Marines. The ITR model of making "every Marine an infantryman" remained intact through the Korean War.<sup>2</sup>

A shift in philosophy occurred in 1965; non-infantry Marines started receiving less infantry training and shifted to the less extensive "every Marine a rifleman."<sup>3</sup> In the 1970's the shift to less infantry-centric training became clear. Only infantry Marines attend ITR for additional training while the recruit depots were responsible for both recruit training and basic individual combat training.

By the late 1980's the ITRs were designated as Schools of Infantry (SOI), where once again all Marines regardless of MOS were trained in infantry skills at Marine Combat Training Battalions (MCT). After MCT, infantry Marines continued to receive additional training at the Infantry Training Battalion (ITB) before reporting to their first unit.

In the mid 1990s, infantry/non-infantry training split once again, with non-infantry MOS Marines going to MCT for approximately 29 days to receive training in: grenades, the M203 grenade Launcher, AT-4 rocket launcher, M240B medium machine gun, defense, convoy operations, fire team assaults, patrolling,

military operations on urban terrain (MOUT), communications equipment, M249 squad automatic weapon and land navigation, thus becoming a "basic rifleman". Infantry Marines on the other hand, attend ITB for approximately 59 days, receiving basic infantry instruction similar to MCT and then additional training to be designated as: 0311 Rifleman, 0331 Machinegunner, 0341 Mortar man, 0351 Assault man or 0352 Anti-tank Guided Missile man. Today, prospective 1812 tank crewmen and 1833 amphibious assault crewmen are trained separately from the infantry during basic infantry instruction.

#### **MACHINEGUNNERS**

In an average infantry battalion six M2 Browning .50 Cal machineguns, eleven MK-19 mod3 40mm automatic grenade launchers, and twenty-nine M-240 medium machineguns provide the bulk of the automatic weapons fire power. Heavy machineguns are typically organized into a combine anti-armor team (CAAT), that often act as maneuver elements instead of support for the line platoons or companies. Conversely, a single tank has two M-240 medium machineguns and one M2 Browning .50 Caliber machinegun, allowing a tank platoon to support an infantry platoon or company with eight M-240 and four .50 Caliber machineguns in a close fight.

Perhaps the most common assistance an infantry company or platoon obtains is mechanized support from an AAV platoon. The AAV platoon in support of an infantry company brings with it twelve M2 Browning .50 Cal machineguns, twelve MK-19 mod3 40mm automatic grenade launchers mounted in the up-gunned weapons station. Despite the great amount of fire power that tank and AAV units provide to support the infantry, 1812 and 1833 Marines do not receive basic 0331 Machinegunner training.

Tank and AAV crewmen do receive training on employing the machineguns mounted in their vehicles, but not from the perspective of providing support to the infantry. The gunnery tables for both tanks and AAVs are focused on destroying or suppressing light armored vehicles. No tank and only one AAV gunnery table has a requirement to suppress an objective for duration. The AAV section only suppresses for the purpose of time, not for another unit to gain a position of advantage.

Tank and AAV Marines should receive their basic machinegun training at ITB so when they arrive at their MOS school the basics are just review. The classes and practical application at tank and AAV schools can focus on employment of their machineguns from mobile armored platforms in support of another elements maneuver.

Some costs are associated with sending tank and AAV Marines through ITB to be trained as machinegunners. During 2006 and

2007, SOI East and West graduated 1,651 machinegunners at an average cost of \$10,615 per Marine with the bulk of the cost in ammunitions.<sup>4</sup> Sending tankers through the course would add approximately 128 Marines each year, while 405 AAV Marines would be added as well.<sup>5</sup> The cost associated with training the AAV and tank Marines as 0331 Machinegunner is minimal when compared to closing the training gap that exists between the armor/mechanized communities and the infantry.

### **REDUCING FRICTION**

A long history of friction between the tank, AAV and infantry communities can be traced from the early 1980s through current operations. The infantry feels that tank and AAV Marines are resistant to providing the support they need; conversely tank and AAV Marines believe the infantry doesn't know how to employ their mechanized assets. Tankers often express problems dealing with infantry "who [do] not have an idea how to employ armor,"<sup>6</sup> and who are not interested in the intricacies involved in the employment of tanks. When referring to the friction between the infantry and AAVs, Major Kevin A. Norton, a company commander during the invasion of Iraq, says:

something was wrong with the system that prepares our infantry and amphibious leaders for the mechanized fight. I believed this to be true because of the extraordinary

amount of friction that seems to occur when the infantry companies and amphibious assault (AA) platoons come together.<sup>7</sup>

The friction is caused because the infantry does not receive training where tanks and AAVs showcase their mechanized capabilities. The AAV Marines often feel they are just a large taxicab used to move between objectives, with disregard to the heavy machinegun support they can provide the infantry. Maj Norton goes on to say, "This problem concerning mechanized infantry can be mitigated through standardizing training and education".<sup>8</sup> Training tank and AAV crewmen at ITB with 0331s will give them an understanding of the support a machinegun provides dismounted infantry. Training tank, AAV and infantry together will begin forming bonds between Marines that will support each other in the future. This understanding coupled with interpersonal relationships would reduce friction between the armor and the infantry communities, as well as shorten the "feeling out period" that always occurs when two units work together for the first time. As is stated in the Marine Corps' cornerstone doctrinal publication *Warfighting*:

All officers and enlisted Marines undergo similar entry-level training which is, in effect a socialization process. This training provides all Marines a common experience, a proud heritage, a set of values, and a common bond of comradeship.<sup>9</sup>



If tank, AAV and infantry Marines were trained together at ITB friction would be mitigated by shared experience, values and the common bond of camaraderie.

### **PREPARING FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS**

The Global War on Terror has highlighted the need for flexibility in training Marines. Combat support Marines frequently perform tasks traditionally reserved for infantry Marines. Artillery regiments have assumed provisional civil affairs and military police roles and perform those jobs admirably. Tank and AAV Marine are no exception to filling provisional roles. As an integral part of the ground combat elements maneuver force and usually working in direct support of infantry battalions or regiments, tank and AAV units are often the first to forgo their traditional MOS requirements and become provisional infantry.

It is an easy transition for tanks and AAV units because they are organized with a similar command structure and the tactics for mounted and dismounted operations are very similar. The tank and AAV battalions have been deploying at least two companies each to Iraq since 2004 with many of these companies performing predominantly provisional infantry tasks, even having companies assuming their own battle space. In fact, AAVs were taken out of Iraq in the summer of 2007. Currently, the two AAV

companies deployed to Iraq do not conduct traditional mechanized operations and the tank companies are predominantly used as a quick reaction force.

In *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, the Commandant describes the Marine Corps of the future as fighting irregular threats in hybrid-type conflicts in densely populated urban areas, requiring a flexible force capable of operating in the full spectrum of warfare. The hybrid conflict is the type of fight in which armored and mechanized vehicles are typically not heavily used, forcing the tank and AAV Marines into provincial infantry roles. The Commandant says of Marines in the future "reality demands that we take their training to a new level. To this end, our doctrine, organization, training, and manpower models and assignment policies must identify ways of realizing this goal."<sup>10</sup> One way to realize the 2025 vision is to train tank and AAV Marines as 0331 Machinegunners, increasing their knowledge, flexibility, and infantry-centric mindset and making them better prepared to fight in hybrid conflicts.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Marine Corps is fighting and will continue to fight in complex battles that require well trained, cohesive and flexible warriors. Since tank, AAV and infantry Marines will be at the "tip of the spear" fighting these battles, the enlisted tankers

and AAV Marines should be trained as infantry machinegunners. The training will allow tank and AAV Marines to better support their infantry brothers because they have had the same training and speak the same language. It will decrease friction because of shared experiences, values and the common bond of camaraderie. It will also make more adaptable Marines capable of fighting the Marine Corps' battles in the future.

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<sup>1</sup>Williams, James L. and Cantrell, Marik E., "Putting Infantry in Every Marine," *Marine Corps Gazette* Vol 71, Issue 4 (Apr 1987): 60.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>4</sup> Ford, John A. email message to author, December 10, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Grazier, Daniel R., email message to author, December 12, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Norton, Kevin, A. "Unnecessary Friction Inside the Marine Corps' Mechanized Infantry Companies" Master of Military Studies Thesis, USMC Command and Staff College, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., iii

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., i

<sup>9</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, Warfighting*, Washington D.C.: Headquarters USMC 1997: 59

<sup>10</sup> Strategic Vision Group. "Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025." [Http://www.quantico.usmc.mil/activities/?Section=SVG](http://www.quantico.usmc.mil/activities/?Section=SVG)

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